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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUGS SUPPLIES -- No. 1

A radio talk by W. W. Vincent, chief, western district, Food and Drug Administration, delivered Thursday, June 5, 1930, through Stations KGO, San Francisco, KECA, Los Angeles and KHQ, Spokane, at 9:45 a.m. Pacific Standard Time.

For fifteen years I have been in this business of enforcing the Federal Food and Drugs Act, a law designed to insure the purity and wholesomeness and honest labeling of the foods you folks use and to guarantee for you the purity and proper branding of your drug supplies.

The Federal Food and Drugs Act was designed to prevent the sale to you of adulterated, debased, sophisticated and poisonous foods. Naturally, I, in fifteen years have had many interesting experiences, met all types and kinds of individuals who participate in the food or drug game. I have seen many crooks vanish from the food and drug trades. I have also seen vanish from the channels of commerce a great majority of adulterated foods, many of which were worthless, and harmful. I have seen the rise and fall in popular fancy of many specialty products, both foods and drugs. I have seen illegal systems and practices with a generation's foothold disappear under the applications of the Food and Drugs Act. In this series of talks I expect to draw largely on my personal experiences; my experiences with illegal products, my experiences with crooks of various descriptions.

I aim to tell you some of the things of which you should be advised, things you should know about your foods and drugs; how your government maintains their integrity. I will tell you how to protect yourselves in the purchase of foods and drugs. I shall strive to implant in your mind a consciousness that perhaps you have failed to do your part in that you have taken too much for granted; that you have not read the labels carefully of those commodities you purchased; in fact I know that practically all of you have been misled in the commodities you have purchased, largely because you have failed to read the labels.

I want that I may cause you to ask of yourselves the following questions; Have I dealt fairly by myself and others in the purchases I have made? Did I get what I desired for the money expended? I shall tell you some of which you never dreamed; of efforts to flood the country with certain fake drugs, with fake mustard; of the greed of man, who by subterfuge sought to dispose of rotten Alaskan salmon by transporting it a distance almost as great as that around the world. I shall not draw upon my imagination but rather rely upon those irrefutable records mostly judgments of the Federal courts; cases of a character in which I participated.

Today I shall relate a story concerning the salmon already mentioned and I also tell you a tale of sugar sold at, roughly, \$29.00 per pound. Later I expect to tell you of the sale of table salt at more than \$15,000 per pound.

On a certain day in December, some years ago in Seattle, a salmon packer, having 15,000 cases of canned salmon much of which was rotten, became aware that the food and drug inspector had sampled the material and it was then undergoing examination. Knowing the condition of the fish and that immediately the examina-

tion was completed the material would be seized by the Federal Government, he under cover of night chartered two boats upon which was loaded this material and started for Vancouver, British Columbia. It was business that demanded prompt action so the president of the company himself acted as captain of one of the vessels. Upon reaching Canada the material was not cleared through the Canadian Customs but rather placed in bond where neither ourselves nor the Canadian officials had jurisdiction. Surveillance of that fish was maintained for almost a year and finally a carload was ostensibly shipped to Kansas City. The food inspector was waiting for it. Never mind how he knew where it was going, - that's his business. In all, eight carloads or roughly 8,000 cases landed in the vicinity of Knoxville and Nashville, Tenn., St. Louis, Mo., and Mobile, Ala.

Distribution was gotten under way immediately but not soon enough for the Federal inspector called upon the state inspector and jointly they took possession of the material. A portion still remained in bond at Vancouver and from time to time portions were exported to various parts of the world. We don't know what happened in every instance upon the arrival of that fish in far distant countries but we have reason to believe that the proper authorities in those countries did know what reached them.

That material and its disposition was kept track of for two years until the last 500 cases arrived in the town of Demerara, British Guiana. Evidently food inspectors were there for it did not meet with the reception anticipated and it started back for New York, arriving there two years and six months from the time that fish was sneaked out of Seattle under cover of night. When it developed that the food inspectors at New York were expecting that parcel of salmon they made no attempt to clear it through the Customs and a few days later it sailed again, part for London and part for Genoa, Italy.

I believe it is unnecessary that I tell you the president of that company discontinued his salmon business, as have some others of his type. This, my friends, is but one of many, many cases wherein the Federal Food and Drugs Act serves to prevent your receiving a decomposed product. Many such actions guarantee you today a canned fish supply that is above reproach. The canning of rotten fish is a business of the past.

I promised I would tell you of the sale of sugar at \$29.00 a pound, a high price, true, but not too high if it would have served to accomplish the end desired at the particular moment it was being sold. An Influenza Epidemic was sweeping our country at the close of the war period. Physicians were distraught and unable to cope with the disease. You all recall they gave us masks and upon first indications of illness put us to bed and gave strict injunctions as to rest, diet and nursing care. Generally they administered certain drugs as their wisdom dictated. One of the more commonly employed drugs was aspirin, also known as acetyl-salicylic acid. It was used not as a cure for the influenza but to relieve pain and discomfort.

The powdered sugar was sold as acetyl saclicylic acid. Acetyl salicylic acid was at that time a German manufactured product, sold in this country by one concern under the trade name "Aspirin." In prescription work the powdered acetyl salicylic acid was generally employed. As is usual, the price of the genuine



product rose steadily with the constantly decreasing supply.

It is at such a time as this the Government Food and Drug agents are especially careful to check the composition of such articles found in channels of trade which are so affected by trade conditions. Experience has taught that circumstances such as these lead to adulteration.

A chemical check of the acetyl salicylic acid found on the markets of several of our larger cities revealed the packages bearing labeling almost identical with the German article but these packages contained powdered sugar slightly acidulated with citric acid. Your food and drug agent was investigating. Apparently the fake Aspirin was emanating from about three sources, one in the east, in the middle West and on the Pacific Coast. On this coast the story told by the retailer was usually the same.

A dapper individual, travelling by automobile would call upon them and a high pressure sales talk followed: The material had been smuggled out of Germany through neutral countries; this was the last of it and, since it was so scarce the retailer usually purchased from one to five pounds. Realize, it was expected that within a short time none whatever would be available in this country.

Your present speaker was calling upon the various drug houses and individuals handling druggists' sundries, in an effort to get a trace or description of the party distributing this material. No good description of the man was available until in San Jose were located two dealers, both of whom had within the past ten days purchased some of the materials. One, because of the book-keeping system employed, had insisted upon paying by check and had the day before received the cancelled check showing it to have been cashed in Los Angeles but several days prior.

At last we were on the trail. The state food authorities also got busy and completed their work at San Jose necessary to a successful conviction should the salesman be apprehended. The Los Angeles Bank identified the man who cashed the check and a visit to his home revealed a rather magnificent house in a restricted section of the city. Upon my several calls he was not at home. Finally, by subterfuge, an entrance was gained. Before leaving I witnessed in his stock of drug materials numerous substitute products to be dispensed by the retail druggists in lieu of widely advertised brands. He had, however, but one broken package remaining of the Acetyl Salicylic Acid.

The following morning a carefully planned arrest by State authorities shortly brought him to trial at San Jose. A fine and jail sentence eliminated him from the drug business. I leave it to you, my friends, can you conceive of a worse crime than the sale of this fake drug product at this particular time? Of our friends and relatives many were dead or dying and we were apprehensive of what tomorrow held for us. Think of it, your physician unwittingly giving you powdered sugar in place of the prescribed drug! Sugar at \$29.00 a pound! There you have it, in 5 grain tablets. Twelve, or 60 grains, were retailed for 25 cents, 250 grains for a dollar. Divide 7,000 grains, or one pound, by 240 which gives you \$29.16 per pound for powdered sugar.

I am certain that as a consumer of food and drug products you can do naught but favor the rigid enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act. That it has been enforced is evidenced by nearly 17,000 completed court cases reported as Notices of Judgment. That the enforcement has been intelligent, you may determine for yourself. Truly, to no nation in the world is given a finer supply of foods and drugs, freer from adulteration, and so truthfully labeled. Do you know the food business is the largest business in the world?

Now I do not expect, by this series of radio talks alone, to give you the working knowledge of the meaning of statements on food labels and of the provisions of the food and drugs act that you need in order to become discriminating buyers of foods and drugs. I do expect, however, to inspire you to write to me for United States Government publications which, with some study, will yield you this information. Let me suggest that you write today for the booklet explaining the organization of the Food and Drug Administration. You are a stockholder in the Administration and are entitled to know about it.

And let me explain that each one of you who writes will go on a permanent mailing list to receive copies of all "read the label" information issued especially for listeners to my series of talks. Send your name and address to W.W. Vincent, United States Food and Drug Laboratory, San Francisco, California.

I shall be on the air again at this time next Thursday. I shall tell you how to read food and drug labels intelligently; how to avail yourself of the full protection afforded you by the Government's effort to safeguard your food and drug supplies. Until next Thursday, good luck, and Read the Label.

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